



Saint John Chrysostom and the "Schism" of the Johannites

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Saint John Chrysostom [1] establishes his ecclesiology, that is, his teaching about the Church, upon the Apostle Paul, who defines the Church as “the Body of Christ,” with its unique Head being Christ Himself. This very image of the Church as the Body of Christ emphasizes two foundational attributes, which are inseparably connected as “the true unity.” Whatever and whoever disputes or attacks the ecclesiastical unity and the truth that it expresses cannot remain a part of the Church, but is expelled from the Body. This is how we understand the intensity with which St. John Chrysostom, like all the Fathers throughout the ages, is vehemently opposed and referred to in the strongest terms against heresy and schism.

While heresy distorts and ultimately destroys ecclesiastical truth, schism undermines ecclesiastical unity. Both situations inevitably lead the instigators and their followers outside the Church to perdition. The phrase of venerable Chrysostom holds significance: “a schism in the Church is no less an evil than to fall into heresy.” [2] This phrase suggests that the violation of the unity of the Church is an extremely serious ecclesiastical offense. Indeed, to emphasize the severity of schism, he goes so far as to say that “nothing so angers God as the Church being divided... neither can the blood of martyrdom,” [3] he said, “remove this sin.” Not even the blood of martyrdom can erase the sin of schism!



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A. The Synod of the Oak, the exile, and the martyrdom of Chrysostom.

John Chrysostom was elected Archbishop of Constantinople in 398 A.D. during the reign of Emperor Arcadius and his wife Eudoxia. He immediately displayed a character devoted to Christian life, strict with himself, a lover of holiness, an incomparable preacher of the Gospel, and an uncompromising defender of the weak. He “played the role of Nathan before David, of Elijah before Jezebel, and of Isaiah against the priests of Baal.” [4] His preaching in the Church of Hagia Sophia stirred the simple people, who expressed their joy with enthusiastic applause and demonstrations of great love for their good Shepherd. However, while the simple people rejoiced in their archbishop, his presence on the throne of the capital soon became intolerable for the corrupt political and ecclesiastical establishment of Constantinople. He was dangerous for the unwise Arcadius and for the powerful and cunning Eudoxia. He was equally dangerous for a portion of the clergy, especially the bishops who had gained their position through transactions (simony) and continued to live lives of luxury and immorality. To grasp the extent of the corruption within the clergy, [5] it is worth noting that Chrysostom deposed thirteen bishops and seventy presbyters in less than six years. He famously wrote, “None of the bishops are faithful, except for a few.” [6]



Saint John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople

Thus, the Palace and a portion of wretched bishops, the "corrupt assembly," [7] joined forces against the archbishop and "sought an opportunity to hand him over" (Luke 22:6). And the opportunity [8] was given in September 403 AD: Theophilus of Alexandria, a harsh and ruthless man, who harbored great animosity towards Chrysostom, arrived in Constantinople with a group of 29 Egyptian bishops. With the consent of the Palace, they collaborated with the enemies of the archbishop and convened a Synod of 45 bishops at the Oak (a suburb of Chalcedon, across from Constantinople). The false accusations against Chrysostom included 29 charges ranging from violence, theft, immorality, contempt for the ecclesiastical order to rebellion and political betrayal! The outcome was predetermined: Archbishop John of Constantinople was deposed and, by imperial order, secretly exiled away from the people, [9] who expressed their strong disapproval. A few days later, while John was in exile in Nicomedia, a powerful earthquake in Constantinople terrified Empress Eudoxia, who regarded it as a divine punishment for the unjust judgment against the archbishop. Repentant, she immediately sent imperial envoys and requested him to return to the Imperial City.

On November 13, 403, the exiled Archbishop returns to his throne after a magnificent reception prepared for him by the entire people at the Bosphorus. However, Chrysostom remained unchanged. He could not remain silent in the face of the contempt for the evangelical law from the Palace, and he continued his prophetic and admonishing sermons. The expected result followed: after a few months, "Herod rages again, and again she is troubled." Eudoxia could no longer tolerate him. In her vile actions, she collaborated with known bishops-enemies of the Holy One in a synod held in Constantinople in January 404. [10] They accused him of being reinstated on the throne arbitrarily, despite having been deposed. The punishment prescribed for this offense was the confirmation of his deposition and excommunication.

Due to the strong reaction of the people, the execution of the punishment was postponed for a few months. The archbishop was confined to the premises of the archdiocese. However, on the eve of Holy Saturday in the year 404 AD, he decided to go to the church to participate in the Easter Vigil and the Baptism ceremony of about 3,000 catechumens! An imperial detachment interrupted the Liturgy, arrested the archbishop, and dispersed those preparing for Baptism, who along with the priests and deacons sought refuge in public baths to complete the Baptism! [11]

Finally, on June 20, 404 A.D., an imperial military detachment arrested the archbishop to lead him into exile in Cucusus of Lesser Armenia, 800 kilometers away from the capital. He remained in Cucusus for approximately three years under very difficult conditions. However, the reputation of the exiled holy archbishop reached the nearby city of Antioch in Syria (approximately 170 kilometers away), resulting in crowds of faithful people traveling from there and other nearby regions to visit him. [12] The situation infuriated Porphyrios, Archbishop of Antioch, a declared enemy of Chrysostomos, who, in consultation with Attikos of Constantinople, and Theophilus of Alexandria, addressed the new Emperor Arcadius. They managed to exile Chrysostomos to the remote regions of the Empire, to Pityus in the Caucasus (present-day Georgia), in a barbarian and idolatrous area. However, due to his weakened health from the hardships, he passed away in Comana of Pontus [13] on September 14, 407 A.D., on his way to the new place of exile, at the age of 60.

He served as the Archbishop of Constantinople for 9 years and 7 months, out of which 3 years and 3 months were in exile! From this brief account of the persecution and death of Archbishop John of Constantinople, certain questions arise that are related to the crucial issue of the stance of the saint towards divisions that afflict the Church.

B. Did St. John Chrysostom accept the synodal decisions that deposed him? Did he accept his successor on the throne of Constantinople as a canonical bishop?

Absolutely not! Saint John Chrysostom never accepted nor implemented, according to his will, the synodal decisions of the so-called Synod of the Oak (September 403) and the synod in Constantinople (January 404). And after his second condemnation, until his death, he considered himself the canonical Archbishop of Constantinople. As long as circumstances allowed, he governed according to his principles until his death. For John, these councils were not based on ecclesiastical order and tradition, and therefore, their decisions were untruthful and invalid. Their rulings could not be considered valid or implemented by the faithful. Consequently, he remained the sole canonical Archbishop of Constantinople.

Characteristic of what holy Chrysostom writes about his successor, Archbishop [St] Arsacius (26 June 404 to 11 November 405): "For I have heard about that liar Arsacius, whom the queen seated on the throne, and how he troubled all his brothers by not wanting to share communion with them. Many of them died in prison because of me. That man in the guise of a sheep is a wolf, having the appearance of a shepherd but being an adulterer. For just as a woman commits adultery by engaging with another man while her husband is alive, so he is an adulterer, not of the flesh but of the spirit. For while I was alive, he snatched the throne of the Church from me." [14] St. John Chrysostom characterizes his successor, Archbishop Arsacius, as a "liar," "wolf in sheep's clothing" and an "adulterer." He doesn't even recognize him as a legitimate bishop, noting that he "has the appearance of a bishop" but in reality, he is an "adulterer." Furthermore, from this letter of holy Chrysostom to Bishop Kyriakos, who himself was exiled for refusing communion with the new Archbishop Arsacius, we learn that Arsacius unleashed persecution with imprisonments and death against the faithful who did not enter into ecclesiastical communion with him.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that until his passing, as long as the challenging conditions of exile allowed, [15] the holy Chrysostom acted contrary to the synodal "deposition" and "excommunication," functioning as a canonical bishop. By way of illustration, we mention:

1. Despite serious illnesses, the dangers posed by bandits and barbarians, the cold, and the desolation, the Saint did not fail to care for his spiritual children in Constantinople, who were suffering at the hands of his persecutors, both ecclesiastical and political. Simultaneously, his love for the young compatriots in exile was abundantly evident. As recorded by the biographer of the Saint, Bishop Palladius of Helenopolis, not only did he receive offerings from the faithful of Constantinople, but also from those from Antioch who visited him, "The blessed John, having resided in Kukousos for a year, provided sustenance for many of the poor in Armenia... (for at that time a great famine had struck that region)." [16]



Fossati brothers restoring the Holy Icon in Hagia Sophia in 1870

Bishop Martyrius of Antioch vividly recounts, "While dwelling in the wilderness, he saved countless souls. He drove away some with his small and meager possessions from the hands of barbarian captors. He dispelled others from the snares of the devil, having acquired them with great effort and grace-filled words. He supported those afflicted by famine and war, nourishing them with flour as he cared for the holy widows. He established monasteries in lands plagued by murder and plunder, relocating entire communities, including the entire city of Antioch, near him." [17] (Although John was in the wilderness with few possessions, he purchased many captives from the barbarians, while with his rich teachings, he rescued numerous people from demonic traps. He also fed others with provisions sent by Olympias the deaconess, "the holy widow." He founded monasteries in areas accustomed to violence and robbery, and indeed, the whole of Antioch moved closer to him.)

2. Saint John showed particular care in instructing the people of the regions where he was exiled: "Not insignificantly did he shine forth in virtues... For he roused, as from sleep of ignorance, those excessively clouded by disbelief, through the ray of his teachings that reached every corner," [18] and "leading many toward unwavering faith, teaching, baptizing, ordaining, and performing miracles." [19]

3. St. John's interest in the evangelization of the people was not limited to the region where he resided. As a true archbishop of the capital, he extended his efforts throughout the entire Empire. During the early days of his exile, while temporarily staying in Nicaea and awaiting the imperial decree to determine his place of exile, he showed particular interest in the missionary work in Phoenicia [20] (Lebanon). He sent letters and sought suitable clergy for this task, whom he found and dispatched. [21] He also displayed the same interest in the progress of the Church in the territory of the Goths (Crimea) [22] and attempted to cultivate the interest of Bishop Marutha, a declared enemy of his, in the evangelization of the Persians. [23] He also expressed concern for Salamis in Cyprus, which was in danger from a spiritual perspective due to being "besieged by the Marcionian heresy." [24] All of this pastoral care was carried out by a "condemned," "anathematized," and exiled archbishop of the capital, yet with a universal consciousness and pastoral sensitivity.

4. Noteworthy is the action of St. John in Arabissus, as described by St. Symeon Metaphrastes. In that region, there were many idolaters who, upon hearing the preaching of Chrysostom about the face of the Lord, "challenged" him, saying that they would be baptized if he could heal a paralyzed fellow citizen of theirs. Chrysostom prayed and, in the name of Christ, healed the paralyzed man.

The result was that many idolaters in the region came to believe in Christ and were baptized. The archbishop didn't stop there; he continued further and, acting as a regular bishop, took on the complete organization of the "newly formed Church" that he had established. He ordained seven bishops, several presbyters and deacons. He translated the Psalter and the New Testament, imparted the form of the Divine Liturgy, continued catechesis, and established formal worship practices (psalmody and prayers). In a short span of time, he not only increased the numerical strength of the new Church but also advanced its adherence to the evangelical commandments. He demonstrated that his spiritual achievements were not minor by his implementation of his pastoral work, declaring his gratitude to God, rejoicing in spirit, extending healing hands to the weak, and generously sharing the best gift of all to them. [25]

In this action of the "condemned" Archbishop, as described by Leo VI the Wise: "Through one [person], he draws the entire country (vast and countless as it is), baptizes, imparts piety, and ultimately ordained a complete hierarchy of clergy there." [26]

C. Did the faithful accept the synodal decisions that deposed him? Did they accept his successor as a canonical bishop and have ecclesiastical and liturgical communion with him?

Certainly not! The faithful people of the capital from the very beginning did not accept the deposition and exile of their shepherd. Despite severe and harsh persecutions, a large portion of the faithful did not have ecclesiastical communion and did not recognize as their shepherds the imposed "successors" of Chrysostom, such as [St] Arsacius [of Tarsus] (June 26, 404, to November 11, 405) and [St] Attikos (March 406 to October 10, 425), because in their conscience, Chrysostom remained their archbishop. The people who remained faithful to Chrysostom and did not have ecclesiastical communion with his successors [27] were derogatorily called "Johannites" by the ruling authorities and were considered "schismatics" by the state Church. However, they formed a glorious army in the life of our Church. It was expected, therefore, that the "schism" of the Johannites would produce many saints, with the most illustrious being the Saint Olympias the Deaconess.



St. Atticus of Constantinople: He Served as One of the Seven Accusers of St. John Chrysostom at the Synod of the Oak (Palladius, Vita John Chrysos. 11)

The love of the people and their efforts to protect their archbishop from the madness of his enemies are moving. It reached the point where they were willing to shed their own blood for the sake of their Father. During his first, brief exile after the Synod of the Oak, John, in order to avoid bloodshed, obeyed the imperial delegation and surrendered himself secretly, hidden from the people to the imperial detachment for exile. The next day, Archbishop Theophilus of Alexandria and his entourage entered as conquerors and ecclesiastical conquerors into the capital. However, the people of Constantinople were informed of the exile of their shepherd and strongly protested. When Theophilus "attempted to enter the Archdiocese's church, he was expelled by the faithful. The Alexandrians of his entourage drew their weapons and a battle ensued. The resistance of the people was active. The Church and the baptistery were filled with corpses, and the font, so they say, overflowed with human blood. As the clash began, the authorities sent troops to reinforce it. Battles raged everywhere. Every church turned into a fortress, where the people barricaded themselves, and the soldiers attacked with spears and arrows. Blood flowed on the altars, and curses replaced the hymn of compassion... The soldiers launched an attack against the monks. They massacred them collectively inside their churches, searching their cells... and they pursued with their swords anyone they managed to escape." [28]

During the second and final exile, even after the death of the saint, the persecutions suffered by the faithful of Constantinople from the state Church were terrible and spread throughout the entire eastern part of the Empire. The triad of Patriarchs (Archbishops) of the East: [St.] Arsenios of Constantinople (and subsequently [St.] Attikos), Theophilus of Alexandria, and Porphyrios of Antioch, [29] could not tolerate the name of the exiled Archbishop John being commemorated anywhere. In fact, the presence of Chrysostom in Cucusus (the place of his exile) near Antioch and the visit of the Antiochians to Cucusus to meet the great exile increased the envy of his enemies, who devised a plan to transfer him to another desolate place, as already mentioned.

However, the persecutions against the person of Chrysostom continued even after his death, targeting the Johannites who did not yield to pressure and continued to refrain from commemorating the bishops who accepted the deposition of John. The intruding successor, "seeing that none of the bishops in the East, nor even the people of the city, communed with him due to his unlawful and illegitimate actions, prepares... the copies (namely, of imperial decrees), forcing those who do not commune with him" [30] to suffer penalties such as confiscation of property, removal from office, fines, and exile, including those who do not have ecclesiastical communion with him, Theophilus of Alexandria, and Porphyrios of Antioch.

The descriptions by the biographer of Chrysostom, Palladius, Bishop of Helenopolis, [31] regarding what the bishops and other clergy who remained faithful to their archbishop endured, remind us of the martyrologies of Roman times. Such hatred, such madness was exhibited by the triad of Patriarchs of the East against them. [32] Saint John aptly notes regarding the bishops who persecuted his spiritual children: “Let none of these things scandalize you, now that a wicked priest has arisen, more savage than any wolf, leaping upon the flock, demonstrating excessive cruelty, imitating the rulers and those in power.” [33]



Return of the Holy Relics of Saint John Chrysostom to Constantinople

Yet, the Johannites remained faithful to their Father while he lived, and even after his death, they continued to remain separated ecclesiastically from those who did not commemorate him as the legitimate Archbishop. Only when 30 years after the death of Chrysostom, [St] Proclus, his disciple, ascended the throne of the Capital and inscribed his name in the diptychs, did the Johannites restore communion with the Church of Constantinople and demand the return of the holy relics of the Saint to Constantinople (438 AD).

Our entire ecclesiastical tradition regarding the "schism" of the Johannites is summarized by Saint Symeon Metaphrastes when he writes about the Johannites: "Those bishops and priests who had communed with him (John) simply, because of their zeal for Christ, were hated by those who acted wickedly in the Church. All of them were subjected to confiscations, exiles, deaths, and various forms of punishment... Thus, some were seen fulfilling close imprisonments, while others were condemned to dwell in distant continents and islands, having previously endured many and severe torments." [34] For Saint Symeon, those bishops and priests who communed with Chrysostom but did not commune with the enemy bishops were subjected to confiscations, exiles, deaths, and various forms of punishment because of their "zeal for Christ." It was because of this "zeal" that they "were hated by those who acted wickedly in the Church"! In other words, according to Saint Symeon, the ecclesiastical authorities of that time who persecuted Chrysostom and those who communed with him were, in fact, a "Church acting wickedly"!

D. What stance did Chrysostom take towards the faithful who refused ecclesiastical communion with his successors?

Let us see, however, what stance the venerable Chrysostom himself maintained towards the faithful who did not commemorate his successors and had severed all ecclesiastical and liturgical communion with them. We must recall that the holy Father himself was extremely strict with those who caused division in the Church, stating about schism, "Nothing so provokes God as the division of the Church... Not even the blood of martyrdom, he said, can cleanse this sin." [35] Following this ecclesiological position, just before his surrender to the imperial custodians that would take him into exile, Saint John, in a moving farewell to his close collaborators (bishops and deaconesses), asked the deaconesses to recognize and enter into ecclesiastical communion with his successor ("incline your heads to him as you did to John"). However, this would be subject to the following conditions: a) he would be consecrated against his will ("being compelled to the ordination unwillingly"), b) he would not seek to seize the throne ("not hesitating in this matter"), and c) he would have the consent of all ("by the consent of all"): "Whoever is compelled to the ordination, not hesitating in this matter, by the consent of all, incline your heads to him as you did to me, John. For the Church cannot exist without a bishop." [36] Naturally, none of the conditions set by Chrysostom were fulfilled in the face of his successors, and for this reason, all of his close collaborators, as we have seen, refused any ecclesiastical communion with them and, of course, did not recognize them as bishops and shepherds.

For this reason, Archbishop John not only did not criticize them but, on the contrary, he marshaled individuals from the Old and New Testaments with his rhetorical skill that characterized him, to congratulate them, praise them, and encourage them in this struggle. For the venerable Chrysostom, the struggle of the Johannites was not only about his personal vindication and restoration to his throne, nor did it solely concern the Church of Constantinople. It encompassed the entire universal Church and its sacred institutions. [37] Writing to the imprisoned bishops, presbyters, and deacons in Chalcedon, he notes: "Therefore, I beseech your love... to show even greater zeal and daily concern for the Churches throughout the world, so that the appropriate correction may be made." [38] In another letter, he utilizes the language of "these noble labors and struggles, toils, hardships, and dangers that you have endured on behalf of the Churches situated throughout the world." [39]

It even goes so far as to note that those who fought against the prevailing ecclesiastical situation after his exile are "righteous a thousand times" and should be counted among "the choir of martyrs, standing alongside the martyrs, the Apostles, and the brave and lofty men, shining with their achievements, sufferings, crowns, rewards, and abundant boldness"! [40] It is worth noting how the golden-mouthed refers to the men, women, and children of the Johannites: "Having anticipated such great slaughters... by defying the rulers of the entire world... presenting themselves adhering to patristic laws and ecclesiastical customs and demonstrating their outspokenness through their words and actions, dying every day, both men and women and children, how could they not be considered righteous myriad times and included in the choir of martyrs?... These individuals, sparing themselves nothing, understand how great a reward they will receive, not for one, two, or three days, but for their entire lives, standing in the ranks, enduring insults, abuses, persecutions, and false accusations. For this is not insignificant... Many have even surrendered their possessions... some their homeland, and others their very lives... speaking boldly to authorities, disregarding torments, laughing at threats, displaying the extent of their virtue." [41]

A little further down, it contrasts the ecclesiastical and state persecutors with their sacred victims: "Consider how many judgments they will receive in that dreadful court, how many punishments they will endure, those who brought upon themselves the turmoil of the entire world, overturned so many churches, waged war in the name of peace, and caused countless scandals everywhere. But those who suffered at their hands, what they endured, will stand with the martyrs, with the Apostles, with the brave and noble men, shining with their accomplishments, their sufferings, their crowns, their rewards, and their abundant boldness... For those plotting against them, the lovers of the world hold them in esteem, praise them, admire them, proclaim them, crown them, those who are knowledgeable and those who are ignorant, those who learn from their actions and those who learn from their reputation, those who share in their countless tribulations, those who strive alongside them, and all who sincerely pray for their well-being." [42]

With special enthusiasm, he writes to the deaconess Pentadia, who suffered greatly, about the victory she achieved over her enemies: "Rejoice and be glad, having won such a victory, and easily trapping such fierce beasts, and sealing their shameless mouths, and tearing apart their raging mouths. For with this truth I struggled, and for this I was martyred many times... So rejoice and be glad (for I will not cease to say these words continuously), be courageous and strong, and laugh at every plot they devise against you." [43] In another letter to the same deaconess Pentadia, he asks her not to leave the city but to stay there and continue to fight in order to encourage other faithful believers with her courageous example: "I bless your crowns, which I now bind upon you, having endured all things with courage for the sake of the truth. Therefore, by defending God, you have a great zeal within you. For until death, as it says, fight for the truth, and the Lord will fight for you. Which has indeed happened. By running this noble race so fervently, I have received many rewards from above. Therefore, I rejoice for this. But since I have come to know that you are considering leaving and moving away from there, I beg you, do not think or plan anything like this. First of all, for this reason: you are a support of the city there, a broad harbor, a stronghold, and a secure wall for the oppressed. Do not cast away this extensive trade of your hands, nor abandon such gain, gathering treasures every day from your presence there. For those who see and hear of your achievements gain great profit. You know how great a reward this bears for you. Firstly, as I said, for this reason we urge you to remain there; for you have provided significant benefit by your presence there." [44]

The letters addressed to the imprisoned clergy for their sake are deeply moving: "Blessed are you, both in your bonds and in your conviction, exhibiting apostolic courage in these circumstances. For even they, being whipped, driven, and imprisoned, endured these things with great pleasure. Not only did they endure with great pleasure, but they also accomplished their own work while in chains, caring for the entire world. Therefore, I urge your love not to diminish from here. Rather, the more suffering you experience, the more you should demonstrate your eagerness and daily concern for the churches throughout the world, so that appropriate correction may take place. Do not be discouraged by your small number, and do not become inferior due to being surrounded from all sides. For in your suffering, you gain greater boldness before God, and it becomes more evident that you will have greater strength." [45]

To other clergy who were also imprisoned for the same reason, he writes: "Blessed and thrice blessed are you, who have endured these good labors, struggles, toils, and dangers on behalf of the Churches throughout the world, shining brightly on the earth and shining brightly in heaven as a result. Indeed, all people of sound mind declare you and crown you, marveling at your sincerity, courage, perseverance, and devotion. The compassionate God, who abundantly rewards labors, will reward you with even greater blessings, in proportion to the great struggle you have valiantly waged for the peace of the entire world. For this reason, we also ceaselessly praise you, delighting in your memory, constantly carrying you in our thoughts, even though we are greatly separated by distance." [46]

Chrysostom praises, encourages, and urges the faithful clergy and laity to continue their struggle against the unhealthy ecclesiastical situation that followed his exile. He considered their struggle as the sole hope for the restoration of proper order in the Church of Constantinople. He says, "Therefore, make use of your readiness at the appropriate time, both by yourselves and through others, as much as you are able. Act and speak with diligence so that you may be able to calm the raging storm. For especially when you are more diligent, it will be more effective." [47]

In a letter to Bishop Theodosius, John Chrysostom urges him to continue the struggle that he himself is engaged in, to honor the Churches and protect them, and to confront with appropriate courage those who have caused turmoil in the world and disturbed the Churches. The holy Father believes that this courageous stance will be the beginning of deliverance from suffering, the security for the Churches, and will aid in the eradication of troubles when the wise interrupt all ecclesiastical communion with those who have caused "such disturbances." "We beseech you, as you have done before, organize, secure yourselves and the Churches, and turn away from those who have created such disturbances throughout the entire world and troubled the Churches, with the courage that is proper to you. For this is the beginning of the resolution of the storm, the security for the Churches, and the correction of the evils, when the healthy among you turn away and have nothing to do with them." [48]

Conclusion: Is the venerable Chrysostom a Defender of Schism?

Certainly not! However, how is it possible for him to encourage the faithful who respected him to stay away from their bishops, not to have any liturgical communion with them, and not to consider them as legitimate shepherds? As we briefly observed, St. Chrysostom never accepted the decisions of the synods of the Oak and Constantinople that deposed and exiled him. He maintained the same stance as a part of the faithful people of Constantinople and refused ecclesiastical communion with his successors. Thus, the "schism" of the Johannites was created in the capital. And yet, instead of condemning the faithful for their "schismatic" behavior, John praises them and encourages them to continue it! But how is it possible for the defender par excellence of canonical order, the fervent preacher of ecclesiastical unity, and a staunch opponent of schism, to praise and essentially encourage the "schism" of his spiritual children?

It should be noted particularly that St. John Chrysostom does not approach ecclesiastical unity superficially, with legalistic terms and external criteria, but rather with a purely spiritual perspective. He is not interested in an external, superficial unity that lacks a solid foundation and is not infused with the Spirit of God. The scholar of the holy Father and exponent of Chrysostom's ethos, Protopresbyter Theodoros Zisis, accurately points out, referring to Chrysostom's interpretation of Paul's "one body and one Spirit" (Ephesians 4:4) [49]: "The authentic interpreter of Paul believes that... the Apostle, after 'one body,' also included 'one Spirit,' to show that... it is not enough for one to be incorporated into the Church, into the 'one body'; one also needs to possess the spirit of the Church, and this applies... not to heretics... but to those Orthodox who belong to the body of the Church, yet lack the spirit of the Church and are sympathetic to heretics." [50]

For St. John Chrysostom, the absence of the Spirit of Truth in an ecclesiastical body undermines its essential unity, even when the other external elements that constitute it are fulfilled. Consequently, this ecclesiastical body becomes not the Body of Christ but a schismatic group. In such cases, the faithful have a duty, according to their position and abilities, to resist and struggle against this schismatic group. On the contrary, in critical and extraordinary moments in the life of the Church, it has been observed that wherever there is pain, anxiety, and a struggle for faithfulness to the ecclesiastical order and tradition, there, even when there appears to be a schismatic situation externally, the Spirit of Truth rests, Christ is present, and His Church is revealed. Therefore, it is not about schism but about the holy Church of Christ! This is what the Johannites have shown us...

In other words, for John, those who despise and act contrary to the established order and tradition of our Church are in schism, even when they hold positions of high authority in the hierarchy and are recognized as ecclesiastical leaders with the tolerance or support of state power. On the contrary, those who obey, respect, honor, and struggle for the established order and tradition of our Church are not schismatics but legitimate members deserving of honor and respect, even if they are few in number or in disagreement and do not communally participate with the bishops who occupy the thrones, who are essentially "false bishops and false teachers" (15th Canon of the Protodeutera Synod).

Therefore, the successors of Chrysostom, Arsacius and Attikos, led themselves into schism through conscious lawlessness and contempt for the ecclesiastical order, which the Johannites fought to eradicate at great personal cost. The position of the forty bishops who stood by Chrysostom is absolutely clear. With the concurring opinion of John, they responded to the Synod of the Oak and particularly to Theophilus of Alexandria, saying, "Do not overthrow the affairs of the Church, and do not divide the Church for which God came in the flesh." [51] In other words, anyone who acts contrary to the holy canons commits the act of schism.

This is reiterated by John Chrysostom himself, who emphasizes: "There are two divisions from the body of the Church. One when we despise love, and the other when we dare to separate ourselves unworthily from that body. In both cases, we separate ourselves from the *pleroma* [fullness]." [52] The holy Father says that it is not a division of the Body but a "division from the body of the Church" that occurs in two ways: In the first case, we have a schism when love is absent and we separate. In the second case, schism is created by those who dare to commit transgressions against the Body of Christ, the Church. In the second case, the one who acts in such a way separates himself from the Body, "we separate ourselves from the *pleroma*." More precisely, according to the holy Father, we do not have a division of the Church because its unity remains undisturbed, but a defection "from the body of the Church" by those who dare to show irreverence towards the holy Body of the Church.



Route of the Second Exile of Saint Chrysostom (404-407 AD)

In other words, unity with the Church cannot be unconditional. A fundamental prerequisite for establishing ecclesiastical unity on a solid foundation is truth, that is, faithfulness to the ecclesiastical tradition and order. Whoever disregards the truth "divides the Church," or more precisely, separates from the Church; they themselves create the schism and are responsible for it. This ecclesiology that permeates our entire ecclesiastical tradition was precisely encapsulated by the 15th Canon of the Protodeutera Synod under St. Photios, which endowed it with canonical authority. Justifying why those clergy who interrupt communion and do not commemorate (i.e., wall off) the bishop publicly proclaiming heresy should not be punished but, on the contrary, "should be considered worthy of due honor," it states that they do not create a schism by interrupting ecclesiastical communion, but rather they took measures to safeguard the Church from schisms: "They did not sunder the union of the

Church, but they sought to rescue the Church from schisms and divisions" since "they condemned not bishops, but pseudo-bishops and pseudo-teachers."

Essentially, in the case of the Johannites, the timeless and always critical question arises: Who truly has the ecclesiastical phronema [mindset]? Is it the one who conforms to lawlessness and impiety, slavishly submitting to purposes other than the truth, usually driven by self-interest? Or is it the one who struggles for the truth, striving with humility and the fear of God, sometimes even enduring increased personal cost? In the year 438 AD, 30 years after the passing of the Great Father, the Church restored and formally reinstated Archbishop John of Constantinople, justifying the outlook, character, and struggles of the Johannites. By doing so, it condemned in this manner all the lawlessness, disgraceful actions, irreverence, and arbitrary acts committed upon the ecclesiastical Body by those powerful ecclesiastical and state actors who, over time, were truly schismatic [53].

References

- [1]. This article is dedicated to our Shepherd, His Eminence Metropolitan Chrysostom of Patras, who is celebrating his name day today. Through the fervent intercession of the venerable Chrysostomos, may the Lord God grant him to serve the Church “rightly dividing the word of Truth.”
- [2]. John Chrysostom, Homily on Ephesians, 11, 5, PG 20, 712.
- [3]. John Chrysostom, Homily on Ephesians, 4, PG 20, 706.
- [4]. A. Thierry, Saint John Chrysostom, the Great Martyr after the Persecutions, translated by Th. Sougakas-V. Tatsis, published by "Christian Hope," Thessaloniki 2003, p. 38.
- [5]. For detailed analysis, see A. Thierry, pp. 36-56, 69-97.
- [6]. John Chrysostom, "Letter 14 to Olympias," 4, PG 52, 617.
- [7]. Saint Neophytos the Recluse, "Encomium on our great Hierarch and Father, divine Chrysostom....," Writings, published by Holy Monastery of St. Neophytos of Paphos, Volume III, p. 395.
- [8]. For detailed analysis, see A. Theirry, pp. 100-160.

[9]. For analysis regarding the Synod of the Oak, see A. Thierry, pp. 161-181, F. Papadopoulos, Saint John Chrysostom, Volume I, pp. 58-73.

[10]. Palladius of Helenopolis, "Historical Dialogue on the Life and Rule of the Blessed John, Bishop of Constantinople, Chrysostom," PG 47, 30-31, A. THIERRY, pp. 204-223.

[11]. For a more detailed analysis, see A. Thierry, pp. 224-234.

[12]. Palladius, "Dialogue," EPE 68, 158: The enemies of the Saint, "for having seen the Antiochians moving from Antioch to Armenia and from there back to Antioch, singing John's delightful philosophy, were praying even to cut short their lives, tormented as they were by the scourges of narrated events (for such is the venomous envy)."

[13]. DOR. DBAR, The Place of Death of Saint John Chrysostom, Thessaloniki 2003, available at <https://thesis.ekt.gr/thesis/BookReader/id/37196?lang=el#page/1/mode/2up>

[14]. John Chrysostom, Epistle 125, "To Bishop Kyriakos and those with Him in Exile," PG 52, 685, EPE 38, 240; 242.

[15]. John Chrysostom, Letter 120, "Theodora," EPE 38, 218: "We have been exhausted, spent, suffered countless deaths. These things, those who have taken up the pen can report with even more precision, and they briefly intersected our lives. We were unable to speak even a little to those before whom we appeared, overwhelmed by continuous fevers, compelled to travel day and night, enduring the heat while besieged, deteriorating from sleeplessness, and perishing from lack of necessities. For even those who work metals and those who dwell in prisons have endured less hardship and suffering than we. Finally, with great effort, I reached Caesarea as if transitioning from a storm to calm waters and entering a harbor. Yet, this harbor also failed to recover me from the evils caused by the storm. Thus, just as before, time worked against us. Nevertheless, upon arriving in Caesarea, I was somewhat refreshed by drinking clean water, receiving bread that was not moldy or stale, and finding a bath like never before. For now, I am confined to bed. I could say more about these things, but so as not to overwhelm your understanding, I will stop here, adding only this: if you continue to reproach us who love you, claiming that, having so many admirers and being clothed with so much power, we did not attain what the condemned usually do, to be settled in a place more comfortable and closer, know that even the banishment of our bodies and the fear of the Isaurians, who besieged everything, did not bring us even this small and humble favor. Glory to God, even for this. For we do not cease to glorify Him in all things. May His name be blessed forever."

[16]. Palladius, "Dialogue," EPE 68, 156.

[17]. Martyrios of Antioch, PG 47, XLIII.

[18]. Palladius, "Dialogue," EPE 68, 156.

[19]. Saint Neophytos the Recluse, "Encomium on our great Hierarch and Father, divine Chrysostom...", Writings, published by Holy Monastery of St. Neophytus of Paphos, Volume III, p. 400.

[20]. A. Thierry, pp. 281-284, 366-370.

[21]. The psychological intensity with which he writes to the Elder Constantine, urging him to take on the apostolic mission to Phoenicia, is moving, especially when we consider the difficult position in which Chrysostom found himself, awaiting the decision regarding his place of exile (John Chrysostom, "To Constantine the Elder," PG 52, 732-733).

[22]. A. Thierry, pp. 370-373.

[23]. A. Thierry, pp. 373-377.

[24]. John Chrysostom, "To Constantine the Elder," PG 52, 732-733.

[25]. Saint Symeon Metaphrastes, "On the Life of John Chrysostom," PG 114, 1193.

[26]. Leo III, "Eulogistic Discourse on the Great Priest of God... John Chrysostom," PG 107, 288.

[27]. Sozomen, "Ecclesiastical History" 8, 23, PG 67, 1573D-1576A: "For it was no longer tolerable for him and those with him to commune or pray together, being aware of the plans of John against them. As for themselves, they gathered in the churches in the outskirts of the city, as has been said, and reported the matter to the emperor. The commander of the troops, along with the soldiers, was ordered to enter and disperse the assembly. While striking the multitude with clubs and stones, he forced them to flee. But those who were more remarkable and zealous supporters of John, he confined within a fortress... When a great disturbance and wailing spread throughout the city, they did not desist from their concern for John even then."

[28]. A. Thierry, pp. 189-190.

[29]. For the character and rise of Porphyrius to the throne of Antioch, see A.Thierry, pp. 311-315.

[30]. Palladius, "Dialogue," EPE 68, 154-156: Two imperial "decrees" were issued. One for the bishops and one for the laity: "The decree against the bishops included this threat: 'If anyone does not commune with the bishops Theophilus, Porphyrios, and Attikos, let him be expelled from the Church and let his personal property be confiscated.' From here, those who were burdened by the weight of their affairs and unwillingly participated (those who were pressured by their great wealth to participate without their consent), the poorer and the weaker in faith, enticed by the promise of certain gifts, joined in the communion (the poorest and weakest were enticed by gifts to adhere to the true faith). Others, looking beyond the perishable status, possessions, and reputation, and enduring bodily distress and suffering, preserved the nobility of their souls by fleeing (some, disregarding their lineage, wealth, perishable reputation, and bodily suffering, preserved their dignity and fled far away to avoid communion)... Some were in Rome, others in the mountains, and still others were preserved in the retreats of the ascetics, sheltered from the maliciousness of the Jews. The decree against the laity contained: 'Those in positions of honor shall be removed from their prestigious positions (they lost their honor), soldiers shall lose their belts (they were deprived of their weaponry), and the rest of the population and artisans shall be fined heavily in gold and subjected to exile (the citizens and craftsmen paid fines and were exiled).' Yet, even these things were done while the fervent prayers of the noble were being performed outdoors with great suffering, with a love for the Savior (despite all this, the liturgical services were conducted outdoors with great hardship due to their love for the Savior)."

[31]. Palladius, "Dialogue," EPE 68, 267-275.

[32]. See also A. Thierry, pp. 239-240, 263-274, 316-317, 389-391.

[33]. John Chrysostom, "To Those Scandalized by the Recent Difficulties and the Persecution and Corruption of the People and Many Priests," EPE 33, 612.

[34]. Saint Symeon Metaphrastes, "On the Life of John Chrysostom," PG 114, 1193-1196.

[35]. John Chrysostom, Homily on Ephesians, 4, EPE 20, 708.

[36]. Palladius, "Dialogue," PG 47, 35.

[37]. John Chrysostom, "To Those Scandalized by the Troubles that Have Occurred, and by the Persecution and Distress of the People and Many Priests," EPE 33, 608: "Appearing to be in accordance with the patristic laws and the customs of the Church."

[38]. John Chrysostom, Letter 174, "To the Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons Confined in Chalcedon," EPE 38, 324-325.

[39]. John Chrysostom, Letter 148, "To the Bishops Kyriakos, Demetrios, Palladius, Eulysios," EPE 38, 288.

[40]. John Chrysostom, "To Those Scandalized by the Troubles that Have Occurred, and by the Persecution and Distress of the People and Many Priests," EPE 33, 632.

[41]. John Chrysostom, "To Those Scandalized by the Troubles that Have Occurred, and by the Persecution and Distress of the People and Many Priests," EPE 33, 608-610.

[42]. John Chrysostom, "To Those Scandalized by the Troubles that Have Occurred, and by the Persecution and Distress of the People and Many Priests," EPE 33, 630-632.

[43]. John Chrysostom, Letter 94, "To the Deacon Pentadios," EPE 38, 168.

[44]. John Chrysostom, Letter 94, "To the Deacon Pentadios," EPE 38, 186.

[45]. John Chrysostom, Letter 174, "To the Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons Imprisoned in Chalcedon," EPE 38, 324-325.

[46]. John Chrysostom, Letter 148, "To Kyriakos, Demetrios, Palladios, Eulysios, Bishops," EPE 38, 288-289.

[47]. John Chrysostom, Letter 174, "To the Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons Imprisoned in Chalcedon," EPE 38, 324-325.

[48]. John Chrysostom, Letter 89, "To Theodosios, Bishop of Skutari," EPE 38, 158-160.

[49]. John Chrysostom, Homily on Ephesians, 11, 1, EPE 20, 686: "One Spirit, he said it well, showing that from the one body there will be one Spirit, or that there is indeed one body but not one Spirit; as if one were a friend of heretics."

[50]. Fr. Theodore Zisis, "Contemporary Ecclesiological Considerations Based on St. John Chrysostom," *Chrysostomika*, Studies and Articles, Patristic Series 9, published by To Palimpseston, p. 323.

[51]. Palladius, "Dialogues," PG 47, 28.

[52]. John Chrysostom, Homily on Ephesians, 4, EPE 20, 706.

[53]. Original Greek Article: Protopresbyter Anastasios Gotsopoulos, "Ο Άγιος Ιωάννης Χρυσόστομος και το «σχίσμα» των Ιωαννιτών," *Enromiosini*, accessed August 21st, 2023, <https://enromiosini.gr/arthrografia/o-agios-ioannis-chrysostomos/>